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ABSTRACT

The physical activities of women in the colonial period in the United States were limited. Social attitudes differed between the northern and southern colonies on appropriate activities for women. In the north it was not considered unseemly for women to participate in ice skating, while in the south women were encouraged to become good equestriennes. In the colonies as a whole, women's recreational activities were limited to less strenuous pleasures, such as dancing, quilting, and decorous swimming (bathing). As spectators, women were permitted to view horse races and boat races. (JD)

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WOMEN IN SPORTS AND GAMES IN THE COLONIAL PERIOD

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What is obvious from an analysis of the various journals, letters, diaries, writings and memoirs written by both females and males during the colonial period, is that the activities pursued by women were different than those of the men. Whereas men were heavily engaged in bowling, shooting, animal baiting, fox hunting and so on, it appears from the various primary sources, that women were much more restricted in the sports and games in which they engaged.

In so far as activities that required physical exertion, women were, in the main, restricted to such activities as ice skating, horseback riding, dancing and foot races at colonial fairs. The less strenuous activities were such as playing cards, quilting parties, pleasure excursions and swimming (bathing). In addition, women were allowed as spectators at horse races and boat races. The evidence of these activities will be examined in turn.

As Holliman put it (1:112-113):

> The seat of horse breeding and horse racing was in the old South, dating there from an early period in history. Southerners loved horses and took the greatest pride in producing fine animals that were able to compete not only with the neighboring horses, but also with those of adjoining states. Never did the lovers of the turf have to contend with the state legislators or trustees passing laws prohibiting the sport. On the other hand, it was given the heartiest favor by the outstanding men of the day—senators, governors, judges, and others. There was hardly a town of any note in the South that did not have its jockey club, and in the spring and fall usually the exciting events of the year took place when the races were held. People from miles around attended, enjoying the sport to the greatest extent while betting on their favorite horse as well as satisfying their thirst and social instinct by drinking whisky in good company.
>
> The oldest and best known track in the country was the Washington Course near Charleston where the races took place every year in the latter part of February. They began on Wednesday and lasted for the rest of the week, and on Friday night the great jockey club ball took place. This annual race week was a popular festival shared by everyone from the Governor and the ladies in the grand stand to the Negroes who sat on the fence tops, enjoying the sport. The whole country in and around Charleston joined in the sport as the horses came down with their owners from the different plantations. Schools, law courts and shops

were closed; only the sick and the infirm stayed at home. In short, Charleston and the surrounding communities were transferred to the race course. The ladies were in their carriages, the gentlemen on their handsomest horses, and the boys on their ponies. The poorer people were in gigs, carts and wagons of every kind, while the Negroes in countless numbers thronged from every direction to the course.

Carson also emphasized the importance of horse-racing in the South, in her study on Virginia. She noted that (2:111): "Virginians of both sexes and all ages and classes were at home in the saddle, and their horses were their pleasure and pride."

This was reinforced by English visitors to Virginia such as Mrs. Anne Retson, the wife of a Norfolk merchant, who described the feeling about racing in verse (2:112):

> But I was so entire a stranger
> To quaking bridges, that I found
> It pleasanter to walk on ground,
> One of these bridges, slight of strength,
> Extended half a mile in length;
> Reaching from Norfolk to the place
> Where, thrice a year, is held a race.
>
> A race is a Virginian's pleasure,
> For which they always can find leisure:
> For that, they leave their farm and home,
> From ev'ry quarter they can come;
> With gentle, simple, rich, and poor,
> The race-ground soon is cover'd o'er;
>
> Negroes the gaming spirit take,
> And bet and wager ev'ry stake;
> Males, females, all, both black and white,
> Together at this sport unite.

Interest in horse racing was not confined to the South. As Gabriel put it (3:168):

> During the 18th century, the people of N. Y., like the gentlemen planters of the southern colonies, established racing on a secure footing. There were annual racing events . . . The gentlemen and ladies of the small city at the southern end of Manhattan Island, travelling on horseback or on chairs and chaises, came in what seemed prodigious numbers to view the spectacles. Two or three thousand persons were large crowds for those primitive days.

It was, indeed, socially acceptable for ladies to attend the races as spectators. The Maryland Gazette of July 2, 1772 noted that (4): "The ladies made splendid appearances at the races wearing the latest fashions, and on one occasion they sponsored a fifty-pound purse." And Andrews (5:120) noted that "on at least one course a 'ladies' gallery', or grand stand, was erected, and there were doubtless others elsewhere." Holliman (1:169) said: "They [women] added much to the scene of animation and life . . . A horse race, particularly in the South, meant virtually as much to the women as to the men."

And, of course, balls often accompanied the races, which added to the interest of the racing season for the women. Robert Hunter recorded in his diary of Wednesday, May 17, for example (2:131):

> The races began today. They started five horses at twelve. Mr. Thornton's Slovan won. Mr. and Mrs. Beverley, Lucy, the three younger ones, Mrs. Daniel, Miss McCarty, etc., dined and stayed with us all night. In the evening we went to a ball at Banks', where I danced with Miss Upshaw . . .

And it was, above all, good for the young lady, as Holliman observed (1:170-171):

> Horseback riding was considered the most salutary of exercises for women. . . In fact, in rural districts every one, men and women, could ride. Women in a new country became fearless riders. They rode to their places of worship on Sunday, and nimble riders many of them were, pacing off from church or running a race home with some beau caught at the close of the service.
>
> The recreation of horseback riding was accepted as the best exercise for women because it required the use of many muscles of the body and by the rapid progression of the body forced more respirable air into the lungs, all immensely valuable for females who did little else than read and sew. Dr. Charles Caldwell speaking of it, said: "Nor can she indulge in a more salutary mode of exercise. For younger females it is equally beneficial. Riding on horseback, moreover, requires some boldness of spirit, the practice tends to lessen that female timidity which is often inconvenient and injurious to its possession as well as to the others."
>
> J. S. Skinner likewise advocated horseback riding for women. He says: "The beneficial effects on the health of females by riding on horseback are of a decided character.

> In all those ailments indicated by the vague epithets of nervousness without pain or much fever when there is palpitation, tremors, paleness of complexion, sick headache, deficient or irregular appetites and the many disturbances associated with indigestion, this kind of exercise will often do more good than all the arts medicinal." "But," says Mr. Skinner, "there is one condition indispensable to the performer for accomplishment of the desired end; it is that the rider shall not be so corseted, tied or bound up as at all to impede the free expansion of the chest, and movement in every direction of her arms. She is not expected, nay she is expressly forbidden to sit on her horse unyielding or unbending as when in a drawing room or at a dinner table. Such a position is as ungraceful as it is adverse to the healthful enjoyment of equestrian exercise."
>
> Horseback riding was considered not only healthful, but also useful in later life to women. To sit well and manage a horse demanded dexterity and patience—useful acquisitions. The equestrienne found the little art of soothing the quadruped, such as slacking the reins, patting his neck and an encouraging word, excellent preparation, it was said, for the management of a restive biped with whom she probably would choose to pass years of her life.
>
> It was feared by some that horseback riding would tend to make women assume a masculine air. The feminine character with all her grace and delicacy had to be preserved. Horseback riding was the nearest approach to manliness that was tolerated. Advocates of the recreation showed wherein a woman rider was not masculine in appearance, but as feminine as when attending a social function. The fair rider seated on the horse was prevented from appearing stiff and constrained by the easy curve of the bridle in contrast with the pendant position of the whip. It was thought also that the rider's hat and feathers, her worked collar, and braided coat gave not only an air of outdoor adventure, but also that of feminine charm.

But dancing and balls were not confined to social activities surrounding horseracing. The literature is replete with references to dances and balls. No other single activity involving women is recorded as much in literature on the colonial period. It was, obviously the single most socially acceptable activity of the ladies.

It is often stated that the Puritans were against dancing, but the evidence is not so clear (7, 8). Scholes, in his book The Puritans and Music in England and New England, said (8) there was "overwhelming evidence" that, indeed, the Puritans enjoyed music and dancing. In fact, it was felt tha dancing promotes grace and an erect carriage, and taught manners.

The Reverend John Cotton, who came to New England in 1633 and became New England's most honored citizen, had this to say while still in England (9):

> Dancing (yea though mixt) I would not simply condemn. For I see two sorts of mixt dancings in use with God's people in the Old Testament, the one religious, Exod. XV, 20,21, the other civil, tending to the praise of conquerors, as the former of God, 1 Sam. XVII, 6, 7. Only lascivious dancing to wanton ditties, and amorous gestures and wanton dalliances, especially after feasts, I would bear witness against, as a great flabella libidinis.

Increase and Cotton Mather preferred "unmixt" dancing, but this viewpoint did not appear to be popular. Indeed, a popular English Puritan publication by John Playford, The English Dancing Master: or, Plain and Easie Rules for Dancing of Country Dances, with the Tune to Each Dance, went through seventeen editions between 1651 and 1728. Playford wrote (10:iii):

> The Art of Dancing . . . is a commendable and rare Quality fit for young Gentlemen, if opportunely and civilly used . . . This art has been Anciently handled . . . and much commend it to be excellent for Recreation, after more serious studies, making the body active and strong, graceful in deportment, and a quality very much beseeming a Gentleman.

Marks noted (7:18) that: "Playford's dances also were democratic in that they were circle or round dances and, therefore, there was not a head couple, a position which in the dances of the court was reserved for the elite."

Dancing around the Maypole was not approved by all, but continued despite opposition. Marks stated (7:16-16):

> William Bradford also showed his dislike of dancing to "wanton ditties" when he wrote, in 1628, of the people dancing around a Maypole. To the Puritan, a Maypole was "a stynching idol" around which heathens worshipped. Therefore, this particular incident, where people danced about the Maypole "like so many fairies," disturbed Mr. Bradford and his friend, John Indecott, exceedingly. They were even more disturbed at the "worse practises" of the dancers in composing "sundry rimes and verses, some tending to lasciviousness," which were "affixed to this idle or idoll May-polle" . . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Despite the fact that the Puritans disliked the Maypole, the ceremony continued for some time. Judge Samuel Sewall wrote in his diary for May 26, 1687, that the people of

> Charleston cut down a Maypole "and Now a bigger is set up and a garland upon it." The next day he recorded how Father Walker had "overheard some discourse about the Maypole, and told what manner it was in England to dance about it with music; and that 'twas to be feared such practices would be here."

And there were court cases in New England in the seventeenth century that centered around dance cases. As Marks (7:16) summarized these:

> Lawrence Water's wife and friend insisted on dancing in Cambridge in 1638 and were brought to court and "all of them were admonished to avoyed dancing." In 1651, at the court of New Plymouth, "Samuel Eaton and Goodwife Halle, of the towne of Duxburrow," were "Released with admonition" for mixed dancing. And in 1662, John Clark, a servant, ran away from his master two or three times because he desired more liberty and a place where he "might live merrily and sing and daunce . . ." Whereas in 1651, it was "observed that there were many abuses and disorders by dauncinge in ordinaryes, whether mixt or unmixt, upon marriage of some p[er]son," and a law was passed stating that upon no occasion would dancing be allowed in the inns and a five-shilling fine would be placed upon those found guilty. While this law forbids dancing in taverns, it says nothing about dancing elsewhere, so long as it is done in its proper place and at a proper time.

The tug and pull with respect to the approval of dancing in New England, doubtless occasioned by the fervor of individuals in a certain community, was likewise seen when dancing masters first appeared upon the scene. Wright (11) and Marks (7) state that the first dancing school in Massachusetts was opened up in 1672, and was soon closed. Soon afterwards, in Salem, a Charles Bradshaw commenced teaching (11:164): "The selectmen gave him permission so long as he kept order." That some could not keep order, and that some were of poor character, is clearly attested to in the records. A frenchman by the name of Henry Shirlot, it is recorded (12:197), was ordered out of the colony because he was a "person very Insolent and of ill fame that Raves and scoffes at Religion, of a Turbulent spirit no way fitt to be tolerated to live in this place . . ."

One of the best known cases was that of a Francis Stepney, who arrived in Boston to start dancing classes, and wished to hold them on

a day of worship, Lecture Day. Judge Sewall, in his diary entry of November 12, 1685, wrote of the case (13:103-104):

> After, the Ministers of this Town Come to the Court and complained against a Dancing Master who seek to set up here and hath mixt Dances, and his time of Meeting is Lecture-Day; and 'tis reported he should say that by one Play he could teach more. Divinity than Mr. Willard or the old Testament. Mr. Moody said 'Twas not time for N.E. to dance. Mr. Mather struck at the Root, speaking against mixt Dances.

Stepney's dancing school ended, and he was fined 100 pounds for his blasphemous conduct. His lack of character was further demonstrated when he departed without paying said 100 pounds.

The Stepney case provoked the ministers of Boston to the extent that they wrote a treatise on dancing, called An Arrow Against Profane and Promiscuous Dancing, drawn out of the quiver of the Scriptures. By the Ministers of Christ at Boston in New England. It is felt that the principal architect of the Arrow was one Increase Mather, the father of Cotton Mather. The case was quickly put (14:1):

> Concerning the Controversy about Dancing, the question is not whether all Dancing be in itself sinful. It is granted, that Pyrrhigal or Polemical Saltation; i.e. where men vault in their Armour, to show their strength and activity, may be of use. Nor is the question, whether a sober and grave Dancing of Men with Men, or of Women with Women, be not allowable; we make no doubt of that, where it may be done without offense, in due season, and with moderation. The Prince of Philosophies has observed truly, that Dancing or Leaping is a natural expression of joy: so that there is no more Sin in it, than in laughter, or any outward expression of inward Rejoycing.

Mixed dancing was what the ministers objected to, not Men dancing with Men or Women with Women. Mixed dancing, it was felt, encouraged people to commit adultery. The main purpose in teaching dancing, particularly children, was to teach good behavior and decent carriage. And though such as Cotton Mather, in A Cloud of Witnesses (15) expressed his non-approval of mixed dancing, by 1700 the people of means in New England began to give balls, and dancing was firmly rooted as part of the social life.

By 1769 in Boston the atmosphere has changed (16:19):

> Herse is a very good Assembly set up since we came, the best there is . . . they say, about sixty couples dance every night once a fortnight the another called the Liberty Assembly is set up in Opposition besides these there is a Concert every other month.

The Dutch, as with the English, brought their customs with them, and in New Netherlands they danced at kermes, Christmas and Pinkater. And in 1641 when Governor Kraft established fairs to encourage agriculture, dances were added (activities) to the fairs (7:22).

The southern colonies were different economically, geographically, socially and administratively, and the attitude to dancing was different, the literature being replete with references. It was considered that dancing was an essential part of one's education, and it became a vital aspect of the social life because of the distances between the farms and the plantations and the need for such social contact.

In the seventeenth century, dancing masters were acceptable in Charleston and South Carolina, though dancing on the Sabbath, as in New England, was forbidden by law. "In Princess Anne County, in 1691-92, Peter Crashly and his wife, and Thomas Dodds were brought to court for fiddling and dancing on the Sabbath, as was William Johnson of Accomac in 1698" (7:24). But other than the Sabbath, dancing's popularity seemed to have no limits. Governor William Gooch wrote to his brother Thomas shortly after his arrival (7:22): "The Gentlemen and Ladies here are perfectly well bred, not an ill dancer in my Government."

It seemed as if every Virginian loved to dance (7:22-24):

> . . . Philip Fithian . . . [for example] expressed amazed wonder at the presence of seventy guests, all of them "genteel," and the variety of refreshments and amusements. Though he did not dance or play cards or join in the drinking songs, he enjoyed the music of French horns and violins, the conversations, the elegant dinner, and the splendid appearance of the ladies, whose silks and brocades rustled and trailed behind them as they danced minuets, reels, country dances and jigs.
>
> This was the customary order of an evening of dances as taught by dancing masters, who instructed the sons and daughters

of the gentry in this important place of their training in manners and deportment. These special tutors held classes in their homes if they lived in a town, and they taught other groups of pupils by moving about in a circuit of convenient plantations.

Ewing put it this way (17:35-36):

> Of all pleasures in Colonial Virginia, social dancing was the most common. It ranged all the way from the artisan's clog to the gorgeous balls at the Governor's Palace. Wherever a fiddler could be found, there dancing was both possible and inevitable. In Virginia dancing was a necessary accomplishment for almost every element of the population. Men of standing provided in their wills that their children should be brought up frugally but that all should be taught dancing. The professional dancing teacher was in demand; in the country districts he rotated his visits among the great houses, the children of all nearby families congregating at one of the homes for instruction . . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> . . . nothing more entrancing can be imagined than a hundred couples in the rich dress of the eighteenth century as they danced the minuet at the ball in the Governor's Palace. But the common people too had their pleasures no less joyous. Those whose souls are thrilled by music are carried off their feet (or onto them) by the strains of the old folk tunes: "Money Musk," "Hop Light Ladies," "I had a Dog and His Name was Rover, When He Had Fleas He Had Em All Over," "Turkey in the Straw," "Old Zip Coon," "Virginia Reel" and all the others . . .How can the most blase keep his feet still as he hears the leader call the dance:
>
> S'lute Yo'r pardner! Let her go!
> Balance all an' do-se-do!
> Swing yo'r gals an 'run away!
> Right and left and gents seshay!
> Gents to right an' swing or cheat!
> On to next gal an' repeat!
> Balance next an' don't be shy!
> Swing yo'r pard an' swing her high!
> Bunch the gals an' circle round!
> Whack yo'r feet until they bound!
> Form a basket! Break away!
> Swing an' kiss an' all get gay!
> All men left an' balance all!
> Lift yo'r feet an' let 'em fall!
> Swing yo'r o'r' sites! Swing agin!
> Kiss the same gals if yo' kin!
> Back to pardners, do-se-do!
> All join hands an' off yo' go!
> Gents salute yo'r little sweets!
> Hitch an' promenade to seats!

Mrs. Anne Retson, who earlier extolled the influence of horseracing in Virginia, had factual reference likewise to the Virginian's love of dancing:

With pleasure saw the time advance,
When they could have the merry dance;
For dancing is their great delight,
They'd jig with pleasure ev'ry night,
and always capering would they go,
Frisking forever on the toe:
I've often thought, in winter weather,
Virginia women made of feather;
No trade for dancing masters there,
Self-taught are all Columbia's fair.

The eighteenth century only saw the increased adoption of dancing in the colonies, from Boston to Philadelphia to Charlottesville. Thomas Jefferson, for example, gave the following advice to his daughter (18:74-75):

> Dear Patsy: — With respect to the distribution of your time, the following is what I should approve:
> From 8 to 10, practice music
> From 10 to 1, dance one day and draw another.
> From 1 to 2, draw on the day you dance, and write a letter next day.
> From 3 to 4, read French.
> From 4 to 5, exercise yourself in music.
> From 5 till bedtime, read English, write, etc.

Journals and letters simply abound with references to dancing, to the partners, the types of dances, the various balls that were held. Women certainly appeared, in the Colonial period, to look forward to dancing as a socially acceptable form of exercise. The court dances in the seventeenth century were the pavan, courante, sarabande, galliard, passefied and minuet. The well educated young lady avidly learned such dances and what other new dances there were in the eighteenth century, for her ability on the dance floor undoubtedly enhanced her prospects of dancing with and meeting young gentlemen.

This general behavior pattern was more clearly revealed with the aristocratic young lady, the leaders-to-be in society. They had more than their share of social gaiety. Brissot de Warville (19:292) commented that Philadelphia women were " . . . peculiarly liable to consumption, and he attributed this fact partly to excessive dancing and unwise diet but also to women's 'want of civil existence.'" In 1768 when Ann Hulton,

who was the sister of the Commissioner of Customs in Boston, came out to stay with her brother Henry and his family, she wrote back to England about the exhausting social life. She wrote of fifty ladies calling on her sister-in-law after the birth of a son, of having twenty people to dinner more than once, of a dancing assembly in Boston of about sixty couples who would meet regularly. Fishing parties were also written of, as were excursions into the country for a dinner and dance. Such activities were not confined to Boston (19:293). "Cambridge had its assembly of twenty couples, patronized by the families of gentlemen with estates near by, who danced once a fortnight throughout the winter."

The social life in New York was likewise extensive. In 1758 Hannah Collinder wrote of sight-seeing and shopping trips to Manhattan and Flushing by groups of young people (21), and Hannah Thomson, the wife of the Secretary of Congress, wrote of the calls ladies made, the plays three times a week, the concerts and the dancing assemblies every two weeks (22). And a certain amount of the social life is depicted in the plays of the period, and particularly in the speeches of Maria Airy in Samuel Low's The Politician Out-Witted (19:294): "In winter, cards, assemblies, and occasional plays filled her social calendar. In spring or summer there were excursions to Long Island, sails on the East River, walks on Broadway, and strolls on the Battery." And Bridenbaugh notes that the wealthier women (23:360) ". . . enjoyed playing cards for stakes," and other activities that set the upper class apart from the rest of the population, such as (23:366): "Driving about ostentatiously in parties with several handsome equipages to princes, or what they called frolics, engaged their leisure hours in the summer, or gay skating and sleighing parties relieved the ennui of the winter days."

And the balls for the aristocrats were things of considerable splendor. As Wharton, in Through Colonial Doorways, put it (24:78-79):

> "The collection of ladies" at this ball, writes a contemporary, "was numerous and brilliant, and they were dressed with consummate taste and elegance. The number of persons present was upwards of three hundred, and satisfaction, vivacity, and delight beamed from every countenance." Colonel William Leet Stone, of New York, thus describes one of the costumes: "It was a plain celestial blue satin gown, with a white satin petticoat. On the neck was worn a very large Italian gauze handkerchief, with border stripes of satin. The head-dress was a pouf of satin in the form of a globe, the creneaux or head-piece of which was composed of white satin, having a double wing in large pleats and trimmed with a wreath of artificial roses. The hair was dressed all over in detached curls, four of which in two ranks fell on each side of the neck and were relieved behind by a floating chignon."

And Franklin brings out the fact that the Schurlkel Fishing Company was "a society of ladies and gentlemen," comprising the "first and foremost distinguished people of the province" (25:75-76). The Company had "a very pleasant room erected" (25) on the Schurlkel, and around it

> . . . are boats, and fishing tackle of all sorts, and the company divert themselves with walking, fishing, going on the water, dancing, singing, conversing and what else they please. The ladies wore a uniform . . . (25)

And sleighing parties were held in the winter. As Holliman put it (1:165)

> " . . . these parties were opportunities for love making and courting."

The sleigh parties must have been great affairs. As Earle put it (26:51-52):

> "Their Diversions in the Winter," Madame Sarah Knight [of Boston] commented [in 1704 on her visit to New York], "is Riding in Sleys about three or four Miles out of Town, where they have Houses of entertainment at a place called the Bowery; and some go to friends houses who handsomely treat them . . . I believe we mett 50 or 60 slays that day—they fly with great swiftness and some are so furious that they'le turn out of the path for no one except a Loaden Cart." Describing one such party in 1768, Alexander Macroby says that the sleighs were preseded by fiddlers on horseback, and the company drove to a country inn "where we danced, sung, romped and ate and drank and kicked away from morning till night."

Skating seemed to be more arguable as an activity for women. Holliman stated (1:165-166):

> Skating, which was an interesting recreation for the men, was almost never practiced by the women. They gave their patronage as spectators by which they added to the

> enthusiasm in giving signs of admiration and approval to some friend who happened to be excelling on the ice by cutting his name or performing some similar work of art. For a girl or woman to have attempted to skate herself would have been branded as scandalous and disgraceful to the female sex. In 1801, at Salem, Massachusetts, it was reported that a teacher of that place had instructed her female pupils in the art of skating. The whole town was aroused. The virtue of this woman and that of the girls was vindicated, however, when it was proved through the columns of the local paper that the report was an absolute falsehood.

Such was not the attitude in New Netherland. The burghus, indeed, were wont to skate to market "'It is admirable,' wrote a visiting English clergyman in 1678, 'to see men and women, as it were, flying upon their Skates from place to place with Markets [market baskets] on their Heads and Backs'" (27:3).

Singleton provides us with the single best description of the winter ~~Singleton provides us with the single best description of the winter~~ activities of New Netherland (28:311-313):

> The Dutch brought with them their love of skating and sleighing and games that were played upon the ice, such as hockey and golf. Not only were the Hudson and the East Rivers often alive with skaters, who went from shore to shore or from settlement to settlement on business errands, but the ponds and canals of New Amsterdam were filled with busy or merry people. The Collect was a favorite spot for the joyous crowds of young and old. When the ice was thick enough, everybody put on skates--men, women and children, young and old--and were soon skimming over the shining surface like birds, or flying like the sails of a windmill. The best skates came from Volendam, but there were many varieties. Generally speaking, they were made of iron and wood, some longer than the foot and some exactly its length. Some people screwed their skates to their boots; others fastened them with leather straps . . .
>
> When once these were on, the heavy and somewhat clumsy Dutch were swift, light, agile, and graceful. Many were the ways, however, of skating. Those from South Holland skated "leg over," and could make innumerable curls and figures on the ice, performing all kinds of antics and fancy skating as they pleased, skating backwards and making the alphabet as they whirled about gracefully, those from Friesland travelled like the wind, and generally won the silver or pewter cups, plates, and spoons that were offered for prizes. Women also took part in the skating-matches, and at such times the ice was as gay as a kermis. From far and near people came to the gathering place, and everything was prepared for their reception. Booths were erected on the ice, and also the Kraampje, or tent, in which

there were wooden stools and a wooden table on which stood two large bottles of Brandewyn, sugar, and tumblers, while a kettle filled with a decoction of aniesesseed and milk simmered on top of a fire.

Many young couples were introduced on the ice, and many were the engagements that followed a long winter . . .

. . . . . .

Skaters also pushed along the sleighs that contributed no little to the brightness of the scene. Here an old lady bundled up in furs sped by in a swan, here a young girl with rosy cheeks flashed by in a blue and gilded dolphin, and here some merry children were flying over the ice in a bright boat, for the sleighs of this period were often made into fantastic shapes, such as animals, ships, fabulous monsters, or shells, carved, gilded and brightly painted.

Apart from New Netherland, however, references to skating do not appear. Swimming is another activity that is rarely mentioned. Holliman has summarized the extent of swimming (1:167-68):

Swimming, which is such a popular recreation with women today, was little practiced by them at this date. Bathing, which eventually led to swimming was indulged in by delicate females for health's sake. A warm bath was thought valuable to their fragile frames, provided it did not last too long. Baths were erected in every section of the country, but those for women were separate and distinct from the men, and were conducted with the greatestof delicacy. In some places the ladies' bath was at a considerable distance from the men's, and even surrounded by a high fence in order to insure the greatest privacy for the timid females. Entrance to the ladies' bath was by a different avenue from those of the men, which made exposure in any form impossible. Female attendants were always at hand to wait upon the ladies at bathing establishments and private rooms were prepared and devoted to their accommodation both before and after bathing. With the delicacy of the females thus protected, they enjoyed the healthful benefits and luxury afforded by bathing.

Some women ventured in the bays and rivers, but this was far from common. Dr. Bentley in his diary speaking of bathing in 1819 said: "We saw the females, not uncovered, enjoying the water of the cove." Few women went in the sea. Owing to the swell they were generally afraid to go into the ocean with a female attendant, and therefore, preferred the assistance of a man. This custom, which was far from being general, gave rise to ill-founded stories of want of delicacy on the part of the females. The traveler who gave an account of this rare bathing in 1833 stated that parties always went into the water completely dressed and for that reason he could see no great violation of modesty. Even though they were in full dress, few females dared to go into water where one had to be accompanied by a man.

There were some women at this period who could swim, but they were not numerous. Mary Palmer Tyler speaks of

swimming at New Lebanon, Massachusetts, in 1792. She says: "Several of my companions, having been accustomed to it, would swim like mermaids, but I was satisfied with descending the steps for my bath. The swimmers would dive off the platform and after sporting around like a bevy of boys skip up the stairs and dress themselves, telling me I was foolish not to share so great a luxury." By 1825 and 1826, when people took a greater interest in the sport of swimming, a man by the name of Bloor suggested that the girls should be given instruction in the art, not from the standpoint of pleasure and sport but from the necessity of their being able to protect themselves from drowning. Bloor thought every person should learn to protect themselves from drowning. Bloor thought every person should learn to swim. He says: "When I say every person I mean females as well as males, for why should not they learn to protect themselves from the danger of a watery grave as well as we? Their lives are dearer to us than our own! They have hands and feet and the same capacity; and no doubt are as capable of learning as we are, and with all due regard to their delicacy, I should be proud, very proud, to have the honor of being their instructor, and could, I am persuaded, adopt a plan by which it may be accomplished without the least violence to their modesty; but, should they object to the instruction by a man generally, the necessary art might be communicated to a few females, if there are not such already taught, and it may this be made general." It is indeed very doubtful if Mr. Bloor ever had the honor of teaching females to swim; that was left to gymnastic teachers of modern times. Until woman gained freedom in clothes, action and thought on land, they did not turn to the water.

Activities involving considerable physical exertion were not approved of for the well-to-do young lady, except for dancing. Most of the approved activities were such as card playing, pleasure excursions, a turtle frolic, knitting, visiting, reading, walking, visiting, attending concerts and plays and weddings, and parties such as at Christmas time.

As Carson put it (2:55): "In Virginia homes card playing was a favorite indoor amusement, which ladies might share with their husbands and guests." Chastellux (29:520) wrote that on a visit to a manor house "Mrs. Hoops gave me a lesson in 'bagamon,' and I gave her one in tric-trac." And, as referred to earlier, women occasionally gambled.

> Sophia Hume exhorted the women of Charles Town in 1747 to cease trying to mix "Religion and Cards," desiring "her neighbor to hold her Cards till she steps up and says her Prayers." Gentlewomen at the gaming table, said the eloquent Quakeress, are bound to no good.

And pleasure excursions were popular, and varied. The aristocracy would venture out to estates to be entertained, and groups of up to thirty or forty gentlemen and ladies would go out by horse and meet and dine together. Such activities practiced by the Dutch were more down-to-earth, and are described by Singleton (28:309-311):

> The Dutch, like the English, were great lovers of out-of-door life and games; and many excuses were made for trips to the country and for excursions and picnics of all kinds by both boat and wagon. In a sailboat, rowboat, or wagon the merry party would travel in the bright days of spring and summer to some pleasure resort on the Hudson or the East River, Harlem, Long Island, or Staten Island. Sunday was the favorite day for these excursions in New Amsterdam, as it was in Holland, but many persons disapproved of spending the Lord's Day in holiday-making.
>
> As a rule the merry-makers started early in the morning and took breakfast at some wayside tavern or country-seat. This consisted of delicious bread and butter, crisp biscuits, luscious strawberries or cherries, sweet and sour cream, old and new cheese, and wine. After breakfast the company again entered the wagon or boat, and drove or sailed farther. Sometimes they would stop in the fields or woods and make wreaths of the long grasses and flowers they plucked, or gather wild-flowers to carry home. They sang, they danced, they played games, and they ate heartily. If the noon-day meal was not eaten in a tavern, baskets of provisions were carried along for an al fresco lunch. If the merry-makers went to the shore, they amused themselves with the game of sea-carrying (zee-dragen). There was no more dangerous game than this. "Carrying into the Sea." The young man took a girl in his arms and walked with her into the sea until the water came over his high boots, and then he carried her back again into the dunes, where he rolled her over and "salted her with sand." This, according to some writers, was done with the idea of the young man finding out what kind of a temper his sweetheart had; and if she did not lose it or become angry, he was sure of having a good and patient wife. How much truth there is in this can be guessed when many times the girls would walk along the sands of the seashore and ask of their escorts "if there was no water in the sea." Many a tear was shed on account of this zee-dragen, and many a sad accident resulted from it.
>
> Sometimes, particularly when the party went by boat, a fish dinner or supper was ordered at a tavern some distance from town. In this case a large fish surrounded with parsley and accompanied by a fine Dutch sauce of melted butter and vinegar occupied the center of the table. After this, fruit, tastefully decorated with vine leaves, was served.
>
> No matter where they went or what they did, kissing formed no small part of the day's pleasure and entertainment. The Dutch

were as fond of love-making as any other nation; and historians admit that the Dutchman deserves his nickname of the "kissing Dutchman." Kissing is constantly referred to in the poems of the period, and the song-books are full of allusions to it. Kissing shepherds and shepherdesses appear in all the Arcadias, and even the most serious poets liked to write about it. When rising in the morning, retiring at night, leaving the house to go to work and returning from it, people used to salute with a kiss. A family or state visit began and ended with kissing. If a young man took his girl from her home to go out, he greeted her with a kiss; did he take her home after the outing, a kiss was given at parting. A kiss was the greeting of honest friendship; a kiss with honor would harm nobody; a little kiss was no sin!

There were few games in which kissing did not have a part, and many were the excuses invented during the country excursions. When the pleasure-wagon crossed a bridge and the horse walked slowly, not needing the attention of the driver, a kiss was quickly given and never resented. This custom was greatly in vogue in New Amsterdam, and very often parties drove towards Hellgate, because in this neighborhood and over a little stream called the Tamkill, emptying into the East River nearly opposite Blackwell's Island, was the famous "Kissing Bridge," in driving over which every one was at liberty to salute the lady.

The turtle frolic was a unique custom, as described by Bridenbaugh (30:165):

In pleasant weather aristocrats of both sexes delighted in rural parties; one of the choicest of these was a turtle frolic. Merchants had standing orders with correspondents for live West India turtles, which were towed astern from the Caribbean, and their arrival gave the signal for a feast. On Christmas Day 1732, Samuel Freetody was host at a famous turtle party for the Newport gentry on Goat Island. Prepared by the slave Cuffy Cockroach, it was a more than worthy predecessor of the clambake. The company sailed over and dined at two, drank tea at five; thereafter the musicians played "Pea Straw," "Faithful Shepherd" and "Arcadian Nuptials" for the country dances. New Yorkers held turtle barbecues twice a week in 1759.

Fox hunting was not practiced by women, they undoubtedly had to, however, express an interest in stories of the hunt. Holliman, however, noted that (1:166):

Fox hunts often were gotten up in honor of the girls in the community, which made them feel that they were taking the important part. The actual participation was confined to blowing the horns before the hunt or riding some especially handsome horse of the hunt.

Just plain visiting, though sometimes the visiting could not be considered plain, occupied much of the time of women. As Bridenbaugh

put it (30:168): "Ownership of country houses made peripatetics of the wealthy citizens. They drove about to visit one another and see the sights, as eagerly and almost as often as their descendants now do in motors. What is more, those of one city began to take extended trips to other cities merely for pleasure."

And when it came to parties, Carson noted:(2:12):

> . . . the best excuse for a big house party was a wedding. Throughout the colonial period the ceremony was performed by an Anglican minister and usually in the home of the bride, and the entertainment consisted of cards and dancing, an elegant supper, a cheerful glass, and a convivial song.

And Mrs. Anne Retson described a wedding in 1799 or 1800 (2:15-16):

A wedding in our family;
My husband's brother's daughter fair,
Was to assume the matron's care:
With winter she was to forsake
Her father, and a husband take.
The rooms were dress'd with flow'rets gay,
The company, in best array,
Converse, and pass the time away,
Till Sol withdraws his brilliant ray;
When, entering the drawing-room
The parson shews the hour is come;
The parents then fetch in the bride,
The bridegroom walking by her side,
Attended by the bride-maids fair,
And bridegroom's-men, in all three pair.
One would suppose this preparation,
Led to a solemn celebration
The matrimonial form well said,
With serious tone devoutly read:
But no such thing, tho' they confess,
And protestants themselves profess,
Yet at the revolution made
No law by which the clergy pray'd,
That when they christen or they marry,
They never on the service tarry,
The ceremony soon is o'er,
The preacher saying little more,
Than you take John and John take thee,
I give my blessing heartily.
The contract o'er, the company
Wish the young couple health and joy;
Then all unite in cheerful mirth,
The laugh, the dance, the song, goes forth;
Till late th' evening hours advance,
When they all quit the song and dance,
Ent'ring the supper-room to eat
Some of a light refreshing treat;

The table elegantly is spread,
With the young couple at the head;
Where chickens, oysters, tarts, and fruit,
With cakes and syllabubs to suit;
Confections, trifles, floating cream,
All there in high perfection seem,
Well frosted o'er, in fact they show
A table cover'd with sweet snow.
Th' effect is pleasing to the sight,
Bright sparkling with the glare of light:
The bridegroom's men and bridemaids wait
Upon the company in state;
Who, when retiring, wish repose,
And ev'ry good the world bestows.
But true enough it's often said,
The brightest prospects soonest fade:
So was it with this blushing bride,
For ere the year was o'er she died.

Sometimes the celebrations of weddings lasted for days, usually involving sumptuous meals, dancing and such activities as horseback riding, and the ladies showing off their various dresses.

The "lesser folk" (2:20) could not afford such lavish entertainment, but the activities were none the less jovial (2:20-21):

> . . . During the morning of the wedding day, friends of the groom gathered at his father's house and accompanied him to the bride's home in time for the ceremony at noon. On the way they amused themselves with a headlong race, started with an Indian yell and finished at the bride's door, where the winner received and shared the prize, "black Betty," a bottle of liquor.
>
> The wedding breakfast was a hearty meal of beef, venison, pork, chicken, and perhaps bear steak with plainly cooked vegetables and pie, served by the bride's attendants. During the meal the bridesmaids performed another function—protecting the bride's slipper from theft. If a guest got possession of the slipper, he received a prize of a bottle of liquor, and the bride could not dance until she had paid the forfeit. Dancing began immediately after the meal and lasted until dawn. If a tired dancer tried to hide out for a brief nap, he was hunted up, paraded on to the floor and required to dance to a special tune, "Hang out till morning."
>
> Before midnight the bride and her attendants were supposed to steal away to the bedroom provided for the young couple, and the groom and his attendants followed. Then came the ceremony of "throwing the stocking." The bridesmaids, one at a time, stood at the foot of the bed with their backs turned toward it and threw a

> rolled-up stocking over their shoulders at the bride. The first to hit the target was to be the next one married. The groomsmen then took turns throwing the stocking at the groom's head. Toward morning black Betty appeared again and a toast was drunk to the couple: "Here's health to the groom, not forgetting myself, and here's to the bride, thumping luck and big children."

A wedding party was a scene of great frivolity, but similar scenes occurred on other festive days such as birthdays and Christmas and late on Washington's birthday.

The activities of the country people had a boisterous and openness and vigor that was lacking among the activities of the upper class. Work on the fields and the farms was hard, and moments of relaxation were seized avidly and enjoyed to the hilt. Even such a seemingly minor activity as strawberry picking could lead to a festive occasion. Daniel Denton wrote, in 1670 (31):

> Such abundance of strawberries is in June that the fields and woods are dyed red; which the country people perceiving, instantly arm themselves with bottles of wine, cream and sugar, and instead of a coat of Mail every one takes a Female upon his Horse behind him, so rushing violently into the fields, never leave them till they have disrobed them of their colors and turned them into the old habit.

And the country dances were somewhat different from the sophisticated dances of the upper class. As Dulles put it (32:37):

> Country people did not dance "la minuet de la cour, with the gavet," or "la minuet ordinaire with the pas grave," so popular with the gentry. Their dances were jigs, and reels, gay and boisterous, and square dances still known in rural communities. They amazed one sophisticated observer in the South. "These dances are without method or regularity," he wrote."A gentleman and lady stand up, and dance about the room, one of them retiring and the other pursuing, then perhaps meeting, in an irregular fantastical manner. After some time another lady gets up and then the first lady must sit down, she being, as they term it, out out. The second lady acts the same part which the first did, till somebody cuts her out. The gentlemen perform in the same manner." He added ungraciously that "in this they discover great want of taste and elegance and seldom appear with the grace and ease which those movements are so calculated to display." To another traveler the "latitude of shuffle" and alternate pursuit of lady and gentleman in these country dances appeared to test "at every turn the respective strength of their sinews."

And the country people, above all, realized the value of cooperation in log rolling, barn-raisings, plowing bees, quilting parties and corn huskings.

Moss (33:195) said that, when putting up a new homestead, families from far and near would assist the new settler in felling the trees and then rolling the logs together.

> The rest of the day was given to merry-making, feasting, drinking and dancing. Later on, when the house or barn was ready to be erected, there was another gathering for assistance and fun, when the home was ready the women folk would hold parties to make the tedious patchwork quilts and this time it was the men who came merely to enjoy themselves. And finally there were the annual husking-. . . when the whole neighborhood met at one barn after another to husk the corn and indulge in a riot of merriment. The highlight for many of this last operation was the discovery of a red ear which entitled the man who found it to a kiss from any girl of his choice in the company.
>
> When the working part of the day had ended the fun began with a huge meal and plenty of drink, both home made and bought, Storytelling, Dicing, Shuffleboard, or card-playing might follow, parlour games in which all could join--. . . and when the evening got warmed up Dancing was certain. Reels, jigs, folk-dances and made-up Dances made the floor shake as the merrymakers, getting hotter, redder, more excited and more drunk, pounded away the hours of the night.

And the fairs, in particular, were looked forward to eagerly by country folk. These were held on special occasions, such as St. Andrew's Day, but eventually a colonial fair emerged in many areas which lasted for days.

A St. Andrew's Day fair programme was published in the Virginia Gazette of 1737:

> We have advice from Hanover County, that on St. Andrew's Day there are to be Horse Races and several other diversions, for the entertainment of the Gentlemen and Ladies, at the Old Field, near Captain John Bickerton's, in that county (if permitted by the Hon. Wm. Byrd, Esquire, Proprietor of said land), the substance of which is as follows, viz.: It is proposed that 20 Horses or Mares do run around a three miles' course for a prize of five pounds.
>
> That a Hat of the value of 20s. be cudgelled for, and, that after the first challenge, the Drums are to beat every Quarter of an hour for three challenges round the Ring, and none to play with their Left hand.

That a violin be played for by 20 Fiddlers; no person to have the liberty of playing unless he bring a fiddle with him. After the prize is won they are all to play together, and each a different tune, and to be treated by the company.

That 12 Boys of 12 years of age do run 112 yards for a Hat to the cost of 12 shillings.

That a handsome entertainment be provided for the subscribers and their wives; and such of them as are not so happy as to have wives may treat any other lady.

That Drums and Trumpets, etc., be provided to play at such entertainment.

That after dinner the Royal Health, His Honour the Governor's, etc., are to be drunk.

That a Quire of ballads be sung for by a number of songsters, all of them to have liquor sufficient to clear their Wind Pipes.

That a pair of Silver Buckles be wrestled for by a number of brisk young men.

That a pair of handsome Shoes be danced for.

That a pair of handsome silk Stockings of one Pistole value be given to the handsomest young country maid that appears in the Field. With many other Whimsical and Comical Diversions too numerous to mention.

And as this mirth is designed to be purely innocent and void of offence, all persons are desired to behave themselves with decency and sobriety; the subscribers being resolved to discountenance all immorality with the utmost rigour.

Rivington's Gazette of November 4, 1780, advertised a colonial fair (26:222:223):

By Permission Three Days' Sport on Ascot Heath formerly Flatlands Plain on Monday. 1. The Noblemen's and Gentlemen's Purse of £60 free for any horse except Mr. Wortman's and Mr. Allen's Dulcimore who won the plate at Beaver Pond last season. 2. A Saddle, bridle, and whip, worth £15 for ponies not exceeding 13½ hands. Tuesday. 1. Ladies' Subscription Purse of £50. 2. To be run for by women, a Holland smock and Chintz Gown full-trimmed; to run the two in three quarter-miles; first to have the smock and gown of four guineas value; second, a guinea; third half a guinea. Wednesday. Country Subscription Purse of £50. No person will erect a booth or sell liquor without subscribing 2 guineas to expenses of races. Gentlemen fond of fox-hunting will meet at Loosely's Kings Head Tavern at day break during the races. God Save the King played every hour.

The race for women had precedent in the country fairs of England, but in this case it was held on Long Island.

In summary, then, the activities of colonial women were by no means extensive. The role of women in Europe and the British Isles tended to be the model in the colonies. There was, however, some variability in

physical activities depending on the particular colony, the middle colonies and the southern colonies allowing for more diversification of physical activities. And the social class and the heritage played a strong part in the activities that were pursued. Country folk had different forms of dancing, the jigs and square dancing, whereas the upper class participated in the minuet and court dances of Europe, though not exclusively. Dancing was beginning to be "Americanized." The quilting bees, the activities following corn husking and barn-raising, the activities of the country fairs such as ladies' races, were strictly for the country woman. And as for heritage, the freedom of the activities of the Dutch women, such as ice skating, was somewhat in contrast to the activities of women in New England, though the attitudes of the Puritan in opposition to dancing have been somewhat exaggeration.

In summary and looking at the colonies as a whole, women in the colonial period participated in ice skating, horseback riding, dancing and foot racing at colonial fairs. Less strenuous activities that were indulged in were such as cards, quilting parties, pleasure excursions and swimming (bathing). As spectators, women were permitted to view horse races and boat races.

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